

Comcast raises broadband speed bar

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Comcast is doubling the transfer speed of its broadband service, another move in the cable industry's campaign to fend off phone companies in the hunt for high-speed Internet customers.

The Philadelphia-based cable company said on Thursday it will boost its maximum download speed of its Comcast Online service from 1.5 megabits per second (mbps) to 3mbps, at no additional charge to customers. It said it will introduce the increases in 14 U.S. markets at first, but added that the "majority" of its broadband subscribers nationwide will be upgraded by the end of the year.

Comcast is not the first cable provider to increase bandwidth, but it is the largest. Some have been offering faster downloads for some time: Cablevision claims an average of 3.5mbps for its Optimum Online, considered to be the fastest Internet access service from a major cable company.

Earlier this week, Time Warner Cable increased its base transfer speed to 3mbps, while Charter Communications boosted its speed limit to 2mbps. Cox Communications has offered 3mbps for many years, according to a representative.

The spate of bandwidth increases comes as cable broadband providers face heightened competition from the Baby Bells--SBC Communications, Verizon Communications, Qwest Communications and BellSouth. These phone companies have been introducing price cuts for their DSL (digital subscriber line) services in hopes of winning over new customers in markets where they compete against cable. Earlier this week, broadband partners SBC and Yahoo [launched a promotion](#) under which customers pay \$26.95 a month for their co-branded DSL service.

Cable companies have not followed the Bells and cut prices, but instead are hoping that speed will be enough to maintain their lead--there are still more households in the U.S. using cable than using DSL, according to research firm In-Stat/MDR. Cable broadband typically is more expensive than DSL, ranging from \$45 to \$55 a month on top of basic cable TV service.

"It's a competitive marketplace for broadband services, and cable operators realize if they can differentiate from DSL, it's all the better for them," said Mike Paxton, an analyst at market research firm In-Stat/MDR.

To begin with, Comcast will raise its broadband service speed in Atlanta; Detroit; Dallas, Ga.; Hattiesburg, Miss.; Independence, Mo.; Knoxville, Tenn.; Lake County, Fla.; Meridian, Miss.; Mobile, Ala.; Muncie, Ind.; Panama City, Fla.; Pittsburgh; Savannah, Ga.; and Tuscaloosa, Ala.

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